

# ANALYZING THE TOURISTS' PLANNING PHASE IN SW COLORADO

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## ABSTRACT

The tourists' planning phase consists of the search and choice behavior that takes place before the trip begins. The planning phase is influenced by a number of factors and understanding these factors may be useful for destination managers and marketers who are trying to stay competitive. This study has the potential to contribute to the understanding of how different groups of tourists navigate the planning phase. To better understand the planning phase of tourists who are visiting SW Colorado, this study collected questionnaire data related to demographic characteristics and trip characteristics from 201 visitors to a heritage attraction.

Key words: planning phase, information search, destination selection.

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is growing and achieved a milestone of 1 billion arrivals in 2012 (UNWTO, 2013). Technology and transportation have allowed tourists access to many previously unattainable destinations, and these destinations are becoming increasingly substitutable (Pike, 2005; Yoon & Uysal, 2003). In order for destinations to maintain a competitive market share, they must understand the processes and components of tourist decision-making. The travel experience is divided into five phases (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). The first phase is the anticipation and planning phase that consists of the information search and destination selection stages. An implication for marketers is that the decisions made by tourists may be highly influenced by the way they process information. It has even been suggested that segmenting markets based on information search behavior may aid marketers in developing effective media to reach their intended target market (Luo, Feng, & Cai, 2004). This study intends to contribute to body of knowledge that supports the understanding of the tourists' planning phase. The results may be practically useful for destination marketers who have a brief window in which to make the most efficient use of their resources to reach the tourists while they are in the planning phase and searching for, evaluating, and deciding upon the information that is available to them about their choices for a potential vacation destination.

To better understand the planning phase experience of tourists who are visiting SW Colorado, this study chose to consider variables such as: how far in advance the tourists began planning, the number of alternate destinations that were seriously considered, the variety of information sources that they utilized, how much of the trip was planned in advance, and whether they had previously visited the destination. These variables were tested against different categories of tourists such as: international tourists, those traveling with children, and those who traveled to multiple destinations in one trip.

In addition to developing an understanding of the general demographic characteristics and trip characteristics of the entire sample, the study will also break the sample into groups to determine if the planning experience differed between groups. The hypotheses based on these research questions are as follows:

- H1: The planning phase experience will not differ for international visitors compared to domestic visitors.
- H2: The planning phase experience will not differ based on whether the visitor is traveling with children.
- H3: The planning phase experience will not differ based on whether the visitor went to multiple destinations.

Following two stages of pre-testing, the survey instrument was finalized and administered during August 2013. The study used iPads and iSurveySoft technology to survey tourists who were waiting for a tour at the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad & Museum in Durango, Colorado. This specific survey site was selected based on its popularity and the opportunity to intercept tourists while they were in a natural waiting period rather than interrupting their tourism experience. Using a random selection strategy, 201 tourists completed the survey. The results of this study will improve the understanding of the trip planning behavior of tourists to the region, as well as

inform management decisions on how to develop a marketing strategy to reach appropriate and profitable market segments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A commonly used categorization of travel phases began in the recreation literature. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) defined five major phases of the outdoor recreation experience that have since been applied to the tourism experience. The first phase consists of anticipation and planning. The second phase is the travel to the actual site. The third phase includes the on-site experience. The fourth phase is the travel back home from the site. The fifth and final phase is a period of recollection that takes place once the participant has returned home. The original phases representing the outdoor recreation experience were quickly adopted in the tourism literature, and seemed a natural fit for use in tourism, especially because two of the recreation phases were directly related to travel.

In addition to the application in tourism of Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) model on outdoor recreation, the tourism literature also supports a model of tourism phases proposed by Van Raaij and Francken (1984). This model expanded upon the planning phase and divided it into multiple segments. Also using five phases, the first was defined as the need recognition phase when the tourist is deciding whether to travel at all. The second stage involves the information search using internal and external sources. Following the search, the tourist enters phase three which involves destination selection and the choosing of the actual location to visit. The fourth phase is their on-site experience and this is followed by the fifth phase which consists of the post-trip evaluation.

This study will focus on the first phase, the planning phase, in Clawson and Knetsch's (1966) model. The planning phase as it will be discussed in this paper consists of the information search stage and the destination selection stage. It should be assumed that the tourist has already made the decision to travel. Within the planning phase, all variables related to the information search stage will be called "search behaviors" and all variables related to the destination selection stage will be called "choice behaviors." This section will outline the literature that exists for the variables related to search behavior (information sources, search horizon) and choice behavior (choice set, repeat visitation).

Developing a brand for a location is based on the idea of place image. Hunt (1971) defines place image as the total set of impressions or overall perception of a place and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) elaborate that place image is dependent on personal and stimulus factors. This perception of a place differs based on the personal factors of individuals so a singular idea of "the place image" does not exist and it may be more appropriate to refer to the common or dominant place image instead of assuming there is one true image (Govers & Go, 2009). The perception of a brand image depends on holistic principles (Govers & Go, 2009) and can often be personal and subjective (Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Place image plays an important role in the information search stage as the number of sources utilized fluctuates based on how much prior knowledge the tourist had of the destination.

In tourism, Gartner (1993) suggests that the process of image formation is fundamental to the destination selection process because tourists naturally seek branding information when looking to select a vacation destination amongst many choices. Tourist destinations ask the consumer to make a considerable financial investment without the ability to pretest the tourism product, and consequently touristic images are typically perceptions instead of reality (Gartner, 1993). Destinations must have a keen awareness of how consumers perceive their brand because image and reputation are the brand's international currency (Anholt, 2010a; Prayag & Ryan, 2011) and a significant factor to success in a competitive market. Consequently, destinations spend considerable resources to create and enhance a favorable image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) in order to be selected with higher frequency than their competition.

Iso-Ahola (1980) explains that tourist choice behavior is a frequently investigated scholarly topic because there are many factors influencing why destination images are imperfect predictors of brand success. One issue is that tourists have very limited mindspace available to store perceptions of distant places and they must use short-cuts to keep the information organized (Anholt, 2010b). Also, images are subjective as well as temporally and culturally specific (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). This subjectivity is complicated further as brand managers are limited in their ability to manufacture an image because they inherit the core assets: landscape, people, culture, and history (World Tourism Organisation and the European Travel Commission, 2009). Dominant images of a destination can affect consumer attitudes towards the products and services there (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2010). The tourist will choose a destination from a set of places that they are familiar with so destination image is an important component early in the decision making process (Gartner, 1993). The high risk of a poor choice when selecting a destination requires tourists to carefully evaluate the brand images for all destinations that are being considered.

When evaluating a potential travel destination, tourists consider internal information such as past experiences, personal motivation and characteristics, in addition to information they receive from external sources (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Without an adequate base of internal information, consumers rely on external information such as brand reputations and marketing initiatives (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). Established brands enter the consumers' conscious awareness and having this prior product knowledge assists consumers when they are making decisions (Brucks, 1985). Specifically in tourism, Beerli and Martín (2004b) define an effective brand as one with a favorable destination image which is strong, coherent, differentiating, and recognizable. Branding is a tool used by destinations to differentiate themselves from their ubiquitous competitors. The information search stage is different for each tourist based on how much knowledge they have of the destination when the planning phase begins. The number of sources and the amount of time devoted to search activity are considered information search in terms of "degree" (Fodness & Murray, 1997) and both variables are included in this study to better understand search behavior.

For each traveler, the information search process varies in duration based on the extensiveness of the external information search. This length of time is called the planning horizon (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983). Typically, the planning horizon is longer when the tourist is traveling far from home and for a long duration (Gitelson & Crompton, 1983). Fodness and Murray (1997) added to the list of variables that influence the length of the planning horizon with: biological age, trip purpose, transportation mode, number of destinations visited, number of attractions visited, lodging type, and trip expenditures. In 1998, Dellaert, Ettema, and Lindh estimated the average trip planning horizon to be 5.5 months for overnight long-distance trip. However, a more recent study (Huh & Park, 2010) found that trip planning horizons are growing shorter. The causes for why travelers may plan their trip closer to their departure date may include issues such as fluctuations in gasoline prices, threat of terrorism, unstable economic conditions, as well as the rapid development of technology (Huh & Park, 2010). There is a strong argument that using the internet to efficiently access information sources has led to the shorter planning horizon (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006). Marketers and destination managers should monitor the shifts in the planning horizon and adjust the timing of their promotions accordingly (Huh & Park, 2010). How far in advance the tourist began searching for information for their trip is included as a variable in this study.

A positive image perception is an invaluable asset for a destination hoping to make the short list of potential choices for a decision maker. The literature implies that the goal of branding is for the destination to be on the short list of vacation choices. Purchasing tourism products and services is a process that includes many decisions and sub-decisions in different stages (Decrop, 2006). There is some debate in the literature about the specific number of sets and the name of the sets (Decrop, 2010), but essentially there is agreement that destination selection is a process where information is accumulated and processed to help the decision maker narrow down their options of potential destinations to the one they ultimately choose. For example, Goodall (1991) presents a model of the destination selection process to explain how tourists choose where to travel. In Goodall's (1991) model, an initial opportunity set is composed of the universe of possible destinations that could be selected. That set is narrowed down as the decision maker may not be aware of certain destinations, have other constraints which make some destinations unattainable, or simply prefer some destinations over others. These criteria help condense the list into the decision set of approximately three destination choices before the tourist makes their final selection based on those three choices (Goodall, 1991). Narrowing down the set of all potential destinations is a necessary process that allows tourists to be more efficient with their cognitive resources by evaluating alternatives in a much smaller and more manageable set of choices.

In addition to Goodall's (1991) model, another commonly referenced model that is similar but simplified was proposed by Um and Crompton (1990). The model is based on Crompton's (1977) two phases of destination choice where travelers first have to decide whether to travel at all, and only then do they decide where they should go. Once the tourist has chosen to travel, they select options from their awareness set to develop an evoked set of destinations that they are considering based on internal and external inputs of information about the destination (Um & Crompton, 1990). In another model, Woodside and Lysonski (1989) offered the term choice set as the equivalent to Goodall's (1991) decision set and Um and Crompton's (1990) evoked set. This choice set is made up of only three to five destinations that have been selected based on awareness, affection, preference, and intention to visit (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). These are examples of the many models that have been developed to understand how tourists process internal and external information resulting in the selection of a destination. The number of destinations that were seriously considered is included as a variable in this study.

The actual choice is just one section of the destination selection process. There are three stages to the image evaluation process that can be applied to destination selection: cognitive, affective, and conative. Scott (1965) explains that cognitive reasoning is an intellectual evaluation of the known attributes of the product which results in an internally accepted image. Gartner (1993) relates this to tourism and explains cognitive reasoning as the knowledge and belief about a destination while affective reasoning describes one's feelings towards a destination. Beerli and Martín (2004b) and Baloglu and McCleary (1999) agree that image is formed by both the reasoned and the emotional interpretation by the consumer. Often, motivations have a direct influence on the affective component of the image because tourists will evaluate a destination based on what they wish to obtain from it (Gartner, 1993). Therefore, the affective component is used in destination selection during the stage when the choice set is being considered (Gartner, 1993). The emotional connection from the affective image is also what influences tourists to spread word of mouth about a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004b). Beerli and Martín (2004a) explain the conative stage as the intended behavior as a result of the previous components. Essentially, the conative image is the action component that takes place after the cognitive and affective processing (Gartner, 1993). Tourists subjectively process images through their intellectual and emotional perspectives before making a behavioral decision that is the result of their holistic evaluation of the destination.

It is not always the case that the result of the planning phase will be a trip to a new or novel destination. It is likely that a tourist may choose a destination where they have previously visited as opposed to choosing a new destination due to behavior called cumulative inertia (McGinnis, 1968) which suggests that behaviorally loyal current visitors are more likely to revisit their experience in the future. Sönmez & Graefe (1998) explain that repeat customers are more likely to repurchase a product or service in the future because there is a lower level of perceived risk when there is an abundance of internal information from past experience. Loyalty to a destination has been studied and categorized in many ways and one way is through the understanding of a concept called place attachment. The emotional connection of place attachment has been defined as the person-place bond that evolves from specifiable conditions of a place (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983). Place attachment has also been defined as the extent to which a tourist values or identifies with the destination (Moore & Scott, 2003). How well the tourist fits in a place or identifies with a place relates to the motives and alternative selves that travelers want to enact at the destination (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Who they identify as when they are in the place is central to their self-concept as a tourist and may explain choice, repeat visitation, and emotional feelings of attachment to a place (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). Place attachment is the ultimate goal for destination brands as they are able to develop loyal customers by understanding their needs and wants (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). Whether the tourist selected a new destination or a place that they have previously visited is included as a variable in this study.

## METHODS

### Survey Site

Surveys were administered in Durango, Colorado over a three week period in August, 2013. The tourism destination offers a variety of natural, cultural, and heritage attractions within a region larger than a single city. Subsequently, the survey defines questions about the "Durango area" based on the knowledge that the town is known for attractions and accommodations that are technically outside of the city limits and the local tourism organization is named for the "area." For example, the Durango Area Tourism Office (2013) reports statistics for the five counties that make up Region 9. According to the Durango Area Tourism Office (2013), the economic impact of tourism in the area is \$2.51 million and supports 2,900 jobs. The average length of stay for a leisure trip in the state of Colorado is 4.5 nights and the most common pursuits for tourists in Colorado include: shopping, visiting a national or state park, dining, hiking, and visiting a landmark or historic site. Of the domestic tourists, 38% come from within the state of Colorado.

The specific survey location was selected based on the opportunity to intercept tourists while they were in a natural waiting period rather than interrupting their tourism experience when they were en route to an attraction. In Durango, CO, one of the most popular tourist attractions is the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad & Museum. The Durango Area Tourism Office (2013) estimates that 130,000 visitors to the Durango Area ride the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad annually. The train ride goes between Durango and Silverton, Colorado and the customers have the choice of riding the train in both directions which would make the total tour time approximately 9 hours, or take a bus one way and the train the other way which would make the total tour time approximately 7 hours. Prices for adult tickets ranged from basic cars with no refreshments or interpretation for \$85 to luxury cars with included refreshments and interpretation for \$189. During the summer months, there are three train departures and three bus departures from the station in Durango, CO. Customers were advised to arrive at least

30 minutes in advance for the train departures and at least 20 minutes in advance for the bus departures. This made a natural waiting period when the researcher could intercept the tourists and invite them to participate. If the train was available for boarding, the researcher waited until customers found their assigned seats on the train before approaching them and inviting them to take the survey at their seat. The customers riding the bus would form a line at the corner where the bus stopped and once they had entered the line, they were invited to participate in the survey. Some participants were able to complete the survey before they boarded the bus and others took the iPad to their seat on the bus to complete the survey. The train and bus departure times were precise and the researcher would have to terminate any survey that wasn't completed when the departure time arrived based on a promise to the organization that the surveys would not interfere with their operation.

### Sampling and Collection Procedures

The researcher completed training for human subjects research and was scheduled to survey at the train depot at the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad & Museum. The depot opened at 7am and the last departure left at 12:30pm. The researcher was scheduled from 7am to 12:30pm to have the ability to intercept tourists during all hours of operation. The total number of hours scheduled were 55 hours and the pre-test estimated that using 4 iPads, the researcher could collect 9 surveys per hour on average.

Customers for the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad have the option to ride the train both ways to and from Silverton or to ride the train one way and ride a bus the other way to or from Silverton. Customers who were riding the train both ways will check in and board the train at the station at 479 Main Avenue, Durango, CO. Per the site approval agreement, the researcher waited until after the customers checked in to approach them. One person from each group was randomly selected to participate in the survey. If the customers were able to board the train immediately, the first person in the group to walk up the train steps was identified and invited to participate. If that person declined, no one else in the group will be invited. If the customers were able to board the train immediately, the sampling area is located indoors and therefore the sampling procedure does not require modification in inclement weather. Customers who were riding the bus to Silverton check in and board the bus outside the station at 479 Main Avenue, Durango, CO. Customers would line up near the corner and the researcher would identify the person standing closest to the corner and invite them to participate in the survey. If that person declined, no one else in the group was invited to participate. The sample recruiting area for the bus is located outdoors with no protection. In the case of inclement weather, the researcher continued to survey until the point that there is the potential for the iPads to become compromised. At that point the researcher waited until the customers were able to board the bus and surveying could resume.

### Data Preparation

A total of 314 people were intercepted as they were waiting for their train or bus to depart. The number of people who refused or declined to take the survey was 43 for a response rate of 86.3%. Two questions were included to make sure that the sample consisted of visitors who were on a trip with the primary purpose of pleasure. Residents were removed from the sample because their proximity to the site invalidates their responses to the questions about the planning phase. Also, Opperman (1999) argues that when researching destination choice, business travelers can and should be removed from the sample because their planning phase is often inconsistent with the planning phase of leisure travelers. There were 5 survey participants who considered themselves residents of the area and there were 4 people who considered business to be the primary purpose of their trip. People who identified as residents or who were on a business trip were offered an abbreviated survey with demographic questions to include in the technical report for the railroad, but these people were removed from the sample for the research study. Out of the 314 people who were invited to take the survey, 262 pleasure visitors agreed. Because the train or bus would sometimes depart before the participant had finished the survey, there were 6 people who did not finish. There were also 55 people who answered fewer than 50% of the items for each construct. These cases were eliminated and the remaining sample size was 201 people. The response rate for usable cases was 64%.

## RESULTS

The goal of the study is to understand the planning phase of the visitors to Durango, Colorado. The analysis took place in two phases. First a general analysis took place to understand demographic characteristics and trip characteristics of the entire sample. The second step was to consider specific groups within the sample to determine if the planning phase was experienced differently by different groups. The groups that were analyzed included international tourists, those traveling with children, and those who traveled to multiple destinations in one trip. Variables that were considered in the group analysis included: how far in advance the tourists began planning, the

number of alternate destinations that were seriously considered, the variety of information sources that they utilized, how much of the trip was planned in advance, and whether they had previously visited the destination.

For the first phase, questions related to general demographic characteristics (Table 1) and trip characteristics (Table 2) were analyzed to understand the profile of visitors to Durango, CO who participated in the study during this period. The average age of visitors was 49.27 years. The percentage of visitors who were traveling with children under the age of 18 years old was 33%. The ratio of gender of the participants was 55% female and 45% male. American citizens represented 89% of the sample. Visitors to the area were most likely to report an ethnicity of White/Caucasian (91%). The visitors were most likely to have received a degree from a four year college as their highest education achievement (34%). The majority of the visitors were employed full-time (58%). The majority of the visitors were married (77%).

Table 1  
Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Mean (SD)
Age	
In Years	49.27 (13.99)
Family Status	
% Traveling with Children	.33 (.47)
Gender	
% Female	.55 (.49)
Citizenship	
% American	.89 (.32)
Ethnicity	
% White/ Caucasian	.91 (.28)
% Black/ African American	.01 (.07)
% Hispanic/Latino	.06 (.24)
% Asian	.03 (.16)
% American Indian	.01 (.07)
Education	
% Grade School	.02 (.14)
% High School	.08 (.28)
% Technical School	.06 (.24)
% Some College	.23 (.42)
% 4 year College	.34 (.47)
% Professional School	.07 (.26)
% Graduate School	.17 (.38)
Employment	
% Full Time	.58 (.49)
% Part Time	.11 (.31)
% Student	.05 (.22)
% Homemaker	.04 (.21)
% Retired	.20 (.40)
% Not employed	.01 (.10)
Marital Status	
% Single	.14 (.35)
% Married	.77 (.42)
% Living with Partner	.05 (.22)
% Divorced	.03 (.17)
% Widowed	.00 (.00)

The average length of stay for visitors was 3.33 days. The average group size was 3.32 people. The average number of days that the visitors began searching for information for their trip was 67.65 days. The average number of information sources that the visitor used during the planning phase was 4.15 sources. The average number of

time that the visitor had previously visited the Durango Area was 1.52 times. The average distance in miles that the visitors traveled was 965.54 miles.

Table 2  
Trip Characteristics

Variable	Mean (SD)
Length of Stay	
In Days	3.33 (1.52)
Group Size	
Number of People	3.32 (1.71)
Search Horizon	
In Days	67.65 (86.70)
Information Sources	
Number of Sources	4.15 (1.85)
Choice Set	
Number of Destinations	2.77 (3.08)
Previous Visits	
Number of Visits	1.52 (2.92)
Distance Traveled	
In Miles	965.54 (492.39)

For the second phase the hypotheses were tested to determine if the trip planning experience was different for groups within the sample. Hypothesis 1 considered whether international visitors had different experiences during the planning phase than domestic visitors. The findings show that international visitors were significantly more likely to begin searching for information for their trip sooner than domestic visitors. On average, international visitors began searching for information 136.64 days in advance while domestic visitors began searching 59.50 days in advance. Another significant relationship was the international visitors had previously visited significantly fewer times (.23 times) compared to domestic visitors (1.68 times).

Table 3  
International vs. Domestic Visitors

Variable	Mean (SD) International Visitors	Mean (SD) Domestic Visitors	F value	p value
Search Horizon				
In Days	136.64 (106.10)	59.50 (81.31)	6.75	.010*
Choice Set				
Number of Destinations	5.67 (3.46)	2.50 (2.93)	1.227	.269
Information Sources				
Number of Sources	4.22 (2.33)	4.16 (1.78)	.543	.462
Planning Style				
% Planned in Advance	.60 (.18)	.69 (.22)	.960	.328
Previous Visits				
Number of Visits	.23 (.69)	1.68 (3.08)	6.808	.010*

\*Significant at  $p < .05$

Hypothesis 2 considered whether the planning phase experience is different for visitors who are traveling with children under the age of 18 years old compared to visitors who were traveling without children. The findings indicate that there were no significant differences between visitors traveling with children compared with visitors who were not traveling with children. Visitors traveling with children were more likely to begin searching for information sooner (76.73 days in advance) than visitors without children (63.33 days in advance). Visitors traveling with children had also previously visited the Durango Area on more occasions (1.71 times) compared to visitors who were not traveling with children (1.44 times). Despite the differences between the groups, none of the tested relationships achieved the standard for significance.

Table 4  
With Children vs. Without Children

Variable	Mean (SD) With Children	Mean (SD) Without Children	F value	p value
Search Horizon				
In Days	76.73 (94.35)	63.33 (82.99)	1.005	.317
Choice Set				
Number of Destinations	2.45 (2.15)	2.98 (3.44)	1.971	.162
Information Sources				
Number of Sources	4.44 (1.78)	4.01 (1.86)	.006	.940
Planning Style				
% Planned in Advance	.71 (.19)	.66 (.23)	1.125	.290
Previous Visits				
Number of Visits	1.71 (4.1)	1.44 (2.06)	3.503	.063

Hypotheses 3 evaluated whether the planning phase was experienced differently by visitors who only visited the Durango Area during their trip compared to visitors who visited multiple destinations during the same trip. The results indicate a significant relationship where visitors who only visited the Durango Area seriously considered fewer destinations (1.57) in their choice set than visitors who visited other destinations in addition to the Durango Area (3.81). It was also found that visitors who only visited the Durango Area planned less of their trip in advance (66.9%) compared to visitors who visited other destinations in addition to the Durango Area (68.3%) though this relationship was not significant.

Table 5  
Single Destination vs. Multiple Destinations

Variable	Mean (SD) Single Destination	Mean (SD) Multiple Destinations	F value	p value
Search Horizon				
In Days	62.72 (69.39)	71.50 (98.86)	2.074	.151
Choice Set				
Number of Destinations	1.57 (1.74)	3.81 (3.58)	6.540	.011*
Information Sources				
Number of Sources	4.09 (1.83)	4.21 (1.85)	.080	.778
Planning Style				
% Planned in Advance	66.95 (18.34)	68.33 (24.35)	3.474	.064
Previous Visits				
Number of Visits	1.76 (3.55)	1.22 (1.99)	2.508	.115

\* Significant at  $p < .05$

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the planning phase of visitors to the Durango Area provides some insight into the search and choice behaviors that were reported. The results are particularly interesting in terms of how the planning phase is changing and the possibility that the changes are influenced by the increasing use of the internet as a resource. This study confirms the findings of Huh and Park (2010) that trip planning horizons are growing shorter. Even international visitors who plan their trip significantly further in advance than domestic visitors are still planning their trips in a shorter window than visitors in the past. Another shift that was identified in this study was the size of the choice set. Woodside and Lysonski (1989) found that the number of destinations that were seriously considered before making a final choice was between three to five destinations. The average visitor to the Durango Area considered far fewer destinations in their choice set than they would have in the past. There may be some relevance to the ease of access to information on the internet that allows visitors to narrow down their choices more efficiently and consider a smaller number of destinations in their choice set. Another trend that might continue into the future is that visitors are taking shorter trips or they are visiting multiple destinations in the same trip and spending less time in each location. The average visitor to the Durango Area reported a much shorter trip than the statistics provided for the average length of stay in the state of Colorado (Durango Area Tourism Office, 2013). The results of this study



conclude that the planning phase is transitioning from the findings in early tourism research. It is likely that trips in the future will be markedly shorter, planned closer to the departure date, and after considering fewer options than what previous research has advised.

The practical implications of this study may be for destination marketers in the region to make decisions about how to best allocate their resources based on the findings. The general demographic characteristics and trip characteristics help build a profile of the visitors to the area. Also, analysis of specific groups may help marketers who are specifically looking to target international visitors, visitors traveling with children, and visitors who are visiting multiple destinations in one trip.

Despite the value in the information gained from this study, there are some limitations that could be improved upon in future studies. For example, the data collection utilized iPad technology to administer the questionnaires. Data collection with iPads has the potential to increase researchers' efficiency but there are also some limitations to this study based on the reliance on technology. The researcher found that some international visitors were unable to complete the survey in English. Future studies should consider having different versions of the survey in different languages that can be uploaded in advance. Another challenge was that some participants who were not comfortable with the touch-screen technology would get frustrated when their intended response did not get recorded. It is likely that a portion of the incomplete surveys or the surveys that were removed from the sample for having less than 50% of the items filled in could have been caused by challenges with the iPad itself. The iPad is also threatened by natural elements in terms of rain or bright sun. To protect the technology, data collection was paused if the iPads were being exposed to rain. Also, several participants struggled to read the iPad screen in the bright sun. Participants explained that there was either an issue with glare or an issue with polarized sunglasses distorting the display screen. Finally, the cost of the iPads limited this researcher to only being able to survey four people at a time in close proximity so the researcher could minimize theft. Outside of the limitations related to the iPads, this study was unable to make conclusions about the mode of transportation. Another recommendation is for future research to consider additional variables such as whether the mode of transportation that the visitors use influences the planning phase.

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